

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PGOV, PINR, NL
SUBJECT: QUEEN JULIANA: THE FUTURE OF THE DUTCH MONARCHY

SUMMARY: ONE DAY QUEEN JULIANA WILL ABDICATE, BUT WHEN IS
STILL ANYBODY'S GUESS. HER DEPARTURE IS LIKELY TO BRING INTO
FOCUS THE ROLE OF THE MONARCHY IN THE NETHERLANDS TODAY AND
RAISE NEW QUESTIONS ABOUT ITS DURABILITY. END SUMMARY

1. LAST APRIL 30, FOLLOWING TRADITION, THE NETHERLANDS
CELEBRATED THE BIRTHDAY OF QUEEN JULIANA WITH FLAGS, FEASTS
AND FIREWORKS. EVEN THE WEATHER WAS BENIGN AS THE USUAL
PARADE OF CITIZEN GROUPS PASSED IN REVIEW AT SOESTDIJK PALACE.
THE NEW PRIME MINISTER VAN AGT READ THE CUSTOMARY CONGRATULATORY
MESSAGE OVER NATIONAL RADIO AND TV. SCHOOL CHILDREN HAD THEIR
TRADITIONAL DAY OFF.

2. DIFFERENT THIS YEAR, HOWEVER, HAS BEEN THE GROWING SPECULA-
TION ABOUT WHEN THE QUEEN WILL ABDICATE. SHE IS NOW 69 YEARS
OLD. ON SEPTEMBER 6 THIS YEAR SHE WILL HAVE BEEN ON THE THRONE
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EXACTLY 30 YEARS. NEXT YEAR SHE WILL BE 70. EITHER DATE WOULD
BE A SUITABLE MILESTONE FOR STEPPING DOWN. THERE IS ROYAL
PRECEDENT. HER MOTHER, QUEEN WILHELMINA, ABDICATED AFTER HALF
A CENTURY ON THE THRONE.

3. THERE ARE NO INDICATIONS, HOWEVER, THAT THE QUEEN IS READY
TO ABDICATE. IN FACT, ALL INDICATIONS ARE TO THE CONTRARY. SHE

CONTINUES TO RELISH HER WORK. SHE IS REPORTED TO HAVE REACTED TESTILY TO A RECENT QUESTION ABOUT HER PLANS WITH THE COMMENT: "BUT DON'T YOU THINK I AM DOING A GOOD JOB?"

4. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT MOST PEOPLE IN THIS COUNTRY BELIEVE THE QUEEN IS IN FACT DOING HER JOB WELL. HER MOTHERLY AND SOMEWHAT AWKWARDLY INFORMAL APPEARANCES AT PROTOCOLARY OCCASIONS SEEM TO TOUCH JUST THE RIGHT DUTCH HEARTSTRINGS. THE RECENT LONG PERIOD OF THE CABINET FORMATION GAVE THE QUEEN OCCASION TO PLAY--ONCE AGAIN--A CENTRAL ROLE IN CHOOSING THE INDIVIDUALS WHO HAD TO PUT A PROGRAM AND A CABINET TOGETHER, AND IT STRENGTHENED THE PERCEPTION THAT IN DIFFICULT TIMES SHE CAN BE COUNTED UPON AS THE SOLID AND RELIABLE ARBITER OF CONFLICTING POLITICAL CLAIMS.

5. MOREOVER, THE QUEEN SEEMS IN NO HURRY TO GET HER ELDEST DAUGHTER, CROWN PRINCESS BEATRIX, READY FOR THE JOB. MOTHER AND DAUGHTER ARE SAID NOT TO BE CLOSE. IN HANDLING THE CABINET CRISIS JULIANA GAVE NO SIGN OF INVOLVING BEATRIX IN ANY WAY. BEATRIX, NOW 40--AS WELL AS HER HUSBAND, CLAUS, NOW 51--ARE, ACCORDING TO INSIDERS, CHAFING AT THE BIT WITH LITTLE TO DO BUT CEREMONIAL WORK, TRAVEL AND WAIT.

6. THE ABDICATION OF JULIANA--WHEN IT COMES--WILL BRING INTO FOCUS THE ROLE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MONARCHY IN THE NETHERLANDS TODAY. POLITICAL SCIENTISTS AGREE THAT HOLLAND, WHICH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DESPITE RECENT CHANGES IS STILL DIVIDED ON RELIGIOUS AND CLASS LINES, ENJOYS ONLY A NARROW NATIONAL CONSENSUS. ONE OF THE KEY SYMBOLS OF NATIONAL UNITY IS THE MONARCHY OR, MORE ACCURATELY, THE HOUSE OF ORANGE. THIS HAS BEEN ESPECIALLY TRUE SINCE THE SECOND WORLD WAR. BUT VARIOUS EVENTS HAVE TENDED TO ERODE THIS POSITION: (A) THE QUEEN'S CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH A FAITH HEALER, (B) BEATRIX' MARRIAGE TO A GERMAN PRINCE AND, MOST RECENTLY, (C) THE LOCKHEED SCANDAL TOUCHING PRINCE BERNHARD. WHILE OVERT REPUBLICANISM REMAINS WEAK, SUPPORT FOR THE HOUSE OF ORANGE HAS WEAKENED.

7. HOW BEATRIX WILL MEET THIS CHALLENGE WHEN HER TIME COMES REMAINS TO BE SEEN. CLEARLY THE COURT, CURRENTLY CONSISTING LARGELY OF TITLED AND OUT-OF-DATE FIGURES, NEEDS TO BE REJUVENATED. BEATRIX WILL NEED TO FASHION HER OWN IMAGE OF A QUEEN WHO CAN CONTINUE TO BE SEEN AS A UNIFYING FACTOR IN THIS DIVERSE AND DIVISIVE SOCIETY. SEVERAL PEOPLE, INCLUDING A FORMER AMBASSADOR AND THE CURRENT HEAD OF THE GOVERNMENT INFORMATION OFFICE, HAVE ALREADY BEEN BROUGHT IN OR ARE ON TAP TO ASSIST IN THIS PROCESS. BUT THE HANDLING OF THE TRANSITION, INCLUDING THE TIMING, WILL HEAVILY INFLUENCE THE DEGREE TO WHICH THE HOUSE OF ORANGE CAN CONTINUE AS A POLITICAL SYMBOL OF THIS COUNTRY'S UNITY.

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